



# Reducing Street Gangs Through Education and Enforcement

**T**he Attorney General's Office continued in 2005 to address New Jersey's growing gang problem through an effective blend of prevention, enforcement and education initiatives.

The Attorney General's principal gang prevention program, PROJECT VISION, continued to grow. Regarding enforcement, the Attorney General's Office joined with police agencies at every level to carry out important sweeps that took gang thugs and their drug-dealing associates off the streets, resulting in the seizure of weapons and other illegally-gained contraband and making neighborhoods safer. Public awareness efforts included an award-winning documentary video "Gangs, Guns and Drugs" exploring the scope, and societal toll, of New Jersey's gang problem, and release of the most comprehensive gang activity survey ever conducted by a law enforcement agency in New Jersey.

## Prevention: 2005 Brought New PROJECT VISION Sites to NJ.

On January 31, 2005, Attorney General Harvey, Gloucester County Prosecutor Sean Dalton and former Philadelphia 76ers professional basketball player World B. Free helped launch a new PROJECT VISION site at the Glassboro Boys & Girls Club in Glassboro, Gloucester County. This after school program was the second PROJECT VISION site opened in New Jersey.

A partnership combining the energy and resources of the Attorney General's Office, participating county prosecutors and a host of community stakeholders, PROJECT VISION gives thousands of young people a safe place to go after school, and a range of positive, in-



Vaughn L. McKoy  
Director

## Division of Criminal Justice

Established in 1970, the Division of Criminal Justice works to protect the rights and safety of the public. The Division accomplishes its core mission in a variety of ways including the development of standards for the enforcement and prosecution of criminal laws, and the investigation and prosecution of unlawful activity including, but not limited to, public corruption, drug and weapons trafficking, street gang activity, bias crime, insurance fraud and environmental crime. The Division takes a lead role in promulgating policies related to all aspects of law enforcement. The Division also provides leadership to the 21 county prosecutors and other law enforcement agencies to ensure uniformity.

- *Director, Vaughn L. McKoy, AAG*
- *Deputy Director, Andrew Rossner, AAG - Fraud and Public Protection Bureau*
- *Deputy Director, Ronald Susswein, AAG - Major Crimes Bureau*
- *Greta Gooden-Brown, AAG - Insurance Fraud Prosecutor*
- *Patricia Prezioso, AAG - Law Enforcement Services*
- *Jessica Oppenheim, AAG - Prosecutors Supervision & Coordination*
- *E. Robbie Miller, DAG - Policy and Legislation*

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### Glouco launches anti-gang program

Courier-Post staff

New Jersey Attorney General Peter C. Harvey and Gloucester County Prosecutor Sean Dalton helped

### Bridgeton children trained in animation as part of state anti-gang initiative

■ The city is one of five in New Jersey to benefit from Project Vision, which hopes to keep children out of gangs by giving them something worthwhile to do.

By DANIEL WALSH  
Staff Writer (609) 704-5111

July 10 to give children an introduction to creating cartoons



Attorney General Harvey with a group of Bridgeton students during a June 2005 PROJECT VISION event held at the Southeast Bridgeton Recreation Center.

formative and fun activities to engage them. Established at each new location through a \$50,000 Division of Criminal Justice grant, Project Vision has a core mission of providing lessons and skills that turn young people toward positive life choices, and away from the false glamour and mythic solidarity of street gangs. The eight core elements of PROJECT VISION include: personal responsibility, caring adults, safe havens, personal safety, academic development, life skills, career awareness and community service. The program's working theme is "Protecting our Future, Preparing our Children."

#### ❖ *Glassboro Site*

Students enrolled in PROJECT VISION at Glassboro receive personal responsibility lessons that emphasize decision-making skills, fair play and respect for self, as well as others. Lessons in personal safety include instruction about the dangers of getting involved with gangs. Community service lessons focus on the spirit of volunteerism and community pride. A weekly workshop on conflict resolution is also provided by staff from the Gloucester County Prosecutor's Office. All programs are provided in a safe atmosphere with the help of caring adults, including mentors from the Prosecutor's Office, local law enforcement and community organizations.

As part of the kick-off event in Glassboro, former National Basketball Association star Free provided a motivational message to students about positive alternatives to street gangs, and engaging in negative behavior. Free, a member of the Sixers from 1975 to 1988, serves as Ambassador of Basketball for the NBA team. In that capacity, he visits schools, recreation centers and playgrounds in the Delaware Valley region teaching the fundamentals of teamwork, basketball and life. Also on hand for the Glassboro kick-off event were Philadelphia 76ers and Flyers vice-president Dave Coskey and a host of community activists and parents.

#### ❖ *Bridgeton Site*

Another new launch site for PROJECT VISION in 2005 was the City of Bridgeton, in Cumberland County. As part of the Bridgeton PROJECT VISION effort, organizers developed a summer program known as the "Adventure Club/Inspireworks Digital Camp." Through the initiative, 24 junior and high school students from Bridgeton and the surrounding area worked to develop digital film projects reflecting their own

life experiences. At the session's end in August 2005, each participant had an opportunity to debut his or her "I Am" film for Attorney General Harvey and Cumberland County Prosecutor Ronald Casella, as well as to other students, parents, friends and community supporters.

Attorney General Harvey cited Inspireworks, a digital software company, as an excellent example of a private enterprise committed to working with the public sector to help young people make positive choices. Inspireworks specializes in creating digital learning content and hosts its own Digital Video production camp for children ages five through 17 throughout the year. In Bridgeton, the company provided a "mobile campus" equipped with computer stations and studios to enable the "PROJECT VISION" participants to develop their digital films.

To date there are PROJECT VISION programs operating in New Brunswick, Glassboro, Bridgeton and Plainfield. Additional PROJECT VISION sites are planned. PROJECT VISION is coordinated by Joi Taylor, Special Assistant to the Attorney General and Hedy Levine-Sabol, Division of Criminal Justice.

## Enforcement: Gangs, Guns and Drugs Initiative

While prevention efforts are an essential aspect of any anti-gang strategy, tough enforcement actions are also required to ensure that neighborhoods never become hostage to street gangs and their drug-and-weapons activity.

In 2005 the Attorney General's Office, through a variety of agencies and cooperative strategies, continued to keep the pressure on street gangs by arresting members and seizing illegal weapons.

In September, Attorney General Harvey and Division of Criminal Justice Director Vaughn L. McKoy announced that 16 people — including reputed local leaders and members of the violent "Bloods" street gang — had been arrested on drug and racketeering charges as part of a six-month investigation targeting a multi-million-dollar powder cocaine distribution network based in Trenton.

The arrests and charges resulted from an extensive, multi-agency probe known as Operation Capital City, and conducted as part of the Attorney General's "Gangs, Guns and Drugs" initiative. The investigation was led by the Division of Criminal Justice, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office, the Trenton Police Department, and the U.S.

Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). The Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office, Mercer County Sheriff's Department, Hamilton Township Police Department, and New Jersey National Guard also assisted.

Originally conceived to address escalating gang violence in Trenton, Operation Capital City at one point led investigators to cocaine suppliers in Texas.

As a result of the investigation, authorities seized cocaine with a street value of nearly \$1 million. Also seized was more than \$285,000, jewelry valued at \$200,000, seven vehicles, and numerous weapons, including a .45-caliber Thompson submachine gun, a 9 mm Intratec TEC 9 semi-automatic pistol, two shotguns, two rifles and seven handguns.

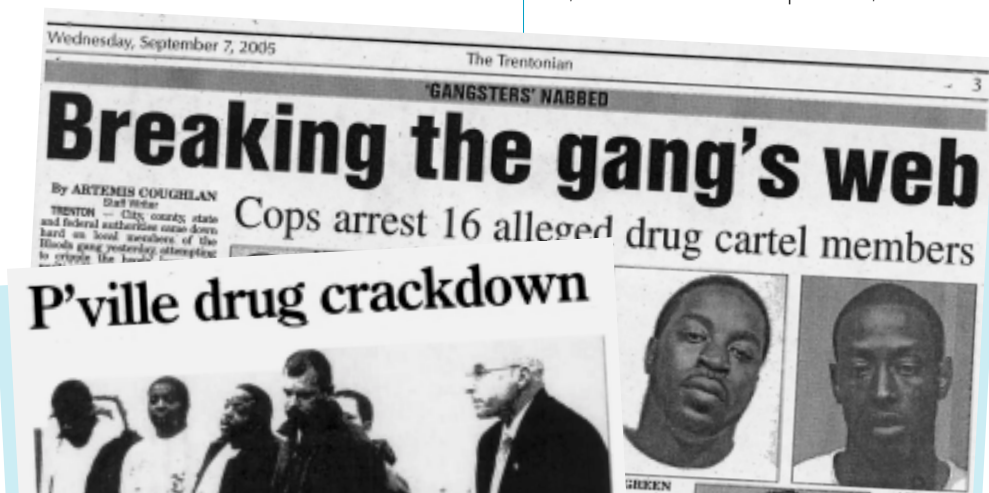
Among those arrested as a result of Operation Capital City were Omar Aikens, 25, of Trenton. Aikens was reputed to be Trenton's largest cocaine distributor, and an area leader of the "Sex, Money, Murder" faction of the "Bloods" street gang. Aikens was arrested on federal drug charges. He was remanded to federal custody after a bail hearing before a federal magistrate. Also charged was Bernard Green, a/k/a. Petey Black, 23, of Trenton. Green is the reputed area leader of the "Gangster Killer Bloods" faction of the Bloods. Green was previously charged with attempted homicide in connection with gang-related shootings in Trenton on August 28.

Assisting in the execution of search and arrest warrants related to the case were the New Jersey State Police Troop "C" TEAMS unit, and the Washington Township, Hopewell Township, Princeton Township and Princeton Borough police departments.

Other key enforcement-related efforts in 2005 included:

#### ❖ *Bloods*

The July 2005 arrest of more than 20 people after an extensive investigation in and around Newark dubbed "Operation Brick House." The operation exposed a direct connection between street-level heroin sales by the Bloods street gang and a Colombian cartel supplier. Begun in September 2003, the investigation resulted in the issuance of arrest warrants for 24 persons in New Jersey and New York. Operation Brick House also pointed to large-scale heroin distributors operating in the Essex County area. These individuals were responsible for distributing approximately one pound of packaged heroin each week within Newark. The heroin eventually made its way to other locations within New Jersey as well, including New Brunswick, Asbury Park and Paterson. Operation Brick House identified a nexus between street gangs, street level drug sales and international drug cartels. A cooperative effort involving State Police, the federal DEA, and the East Orange and Newark Police Departments, Operation Brick House initially targeted alleged heroin sales by Bloods members in and around the Felix Fuld Public Housing Complex in Newark. The complex, also known as "Little Bricks,"



had been rampant with violence and drug distribution run by members of the Bloods street gang. Luis Manuel Antonio Estevez of New York was identified as a key supplier, allegedly selling large amounts of packaged heroin to dealers in Essex County. The same heroin was eventually sold to Bloods street gang members. Estevez was arrested by members of the New Jersey State Police Street Gang Bureau and charged with being the leader of a narcotic distribution network, racketeering and conspiracy. He was jailed in lieu of \$2.5 million bail. Also participating in Operation Brick House were the Essex County Prosecutor's Office, federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement Administration, United States Marshall's Service, New York City Police Department, and the Tinton Falls Police Department.

### ❖ *Latin Kings*

The indictment in June 2005 of six members of the notorious Latin Kings Street Gang on charges including criminal conspiracy, attempted murder, aggravated assault, and weapons violations related to the 2004 attempted murder of a former gang member. The charges resulted from a continuing effort by the Attorney General's "Gangs, Guns and Drugs" initiative and the Division of State Police's Street Gang Bureau targeting violent street gangs operating throughout New Jersey. The indictment resulted from an intensive investigation conducted by the North Bergen Police Department and the New Jersey State Police Street Gang Unit. The Division of Criminal Justice's Organized Crime & Racketeering Bureau coordinated the prosecution. The investigation focused on the August 2004 stabbing and slashing of a former gang member by local chapter leaders and fellow members of the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation street gang operating in Jersey City.

### ❖ *Other Gangs*

The arrest, in March 2005, of 12 members of an organized drug trafficking cartel based in and around Pleasantville, Atlantic County. Members of the cartel were allegedly responsible for operating and controlling a major portion of the powder cocaine and "crack" cocaine trade in the Pleasantville/Atlantic City area, parts of lower Camden County, and parts of Cumberland County. Known as "Operation Pleasant Streets," the investigation focused on a group that had increased its illicit narcotics dealing activities after a successful raid by state and local agencies, in March 2004, had resulted in the arrest of 22 persons trafficking in cocaine and marijuana out of the Stanley Holmes public housing development in Atlantic City in 2004. Operation Pleasant Streets was a collaborative effort between the Atlantic County Prosecutors' Office, Pleasantville Police Department and the Division of Criminal Justice within the Attorney General's Office. "Operation Pleasant Streets" also resulted in the confiscation of two kilo-

grams (approximately four pounds) of cocaine with a street value of more than \$100,000 and more than 11 ounces of processed crack cocaine. Additionally, more than \$10,000 in cash was seized, along with two illegal handguns.

## AG, NJSP Issued State's Most Comprehensive Gang Survey Yet

Also in 2005, the Division of State Police released the results of an exhaustive survey on street gang activity throughout the state. The survey placed the number of street gang members operating in New Jersey at nearly 17,000, and the number of gangs at nearly 700. Based on a 2004 State Police Gang Bureau survey of law enforcement personnel in the 479 municipalities that maintain full-time police departments — 91% of those departments responded — the survey provided the most comprehensive, law-enforcement-based estimate of street gang membership issued in New Jersey to date.

In addition to providing a statistical picture of the street gang presence in New Jersey, the survey offered compelling anecdotal evidence that gang activity is on the rise statewide. For example:

- ❖ 28 gangs in New Jersey have more than 100 members. Those 28 gangs account for 56% of all gang members within the state.
- ❖ 22 street gangs were reported to have a female membership of 25% or more. Within the statewide membership of 16,700 gang members, the ratio of male gang members to female gang members is about 9-to-1
- ❖ In 39% of responding suburban municipalities, police reported the presence of gangs in their towns, an increase of 27% compared to 2001.
- ❖ Approximately 17% of all reported homicides in New Jersey involved gang members.

- ❖ There are more than an estimated 2,300 gang members in New Jersey under age 15. Statewide, 18-to-24-year-olds form the largest single subgroup of gang members, followed by 15-to-17-year-olds, and then those older than 24.

## Education: Award Winning Anti-Gang Video

A powerful gang awareness video created by the Attorney General's Office in cooperation with New Jersey Network (NJN) continued to circulate to an ever-widening audience of parents, educators, law enforcement members and other community stakeholders, informing them — in visceral terms — about the true nature, and societal toll, of gang activity in New Jersey. Entitled "Gangs, Guns and Drugs," the video received international recognition via several prestigious media excellence awards in 2005, including three Telly Awards and one award from the intermedia World Media Festival. The video was one of more than 10,000 entries in the international Telly Awards competition, where it won awards in three separate categories. The Telly Awards is the premier award honoring outstanding local, regional, and cable TV commercials and programs, as well as the finest video and film productions. The Telly Awards annually showcases the best work of the most respected advertising agencies, production companies, television stations, cable operators, and corporate video departments in the world. At the World Media Festival in Hamburg, Germany, "Gangs, Guns, and Drugs" won a silver intermedia-globe award. Although many American videos were entered in the competition, few entries from the United States won an award. View the video at [www.NJGangFree.org](http://www.NJGangFree.org).

## Division of Criminal Justice Statistics

